



PLANNING SERVICES IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN

April 2023

Recommendation 1. The Council needs to assure itself that fundamental foundations are in place to enable it to sustainably deliver an effective service.

Rationale:

Audit Wales has identified a number of challenges currently facing the Councils Planning service. These include performance, governance arrangements, workforce development and strategic and corporate alignment. The priorities for this recommendation aim to address these areas.

Priorities:

- a) review the political and strategic intent for its planning enforcement responsibilities, clearly communicate this, and align resources to deliver the Council's chosen intent.
- b) develop a Planning Services Business Plan which underpins the Property, Planning and Public Protection Integrated Business Plan. It should clarify the planning service's links between the planning service and the Council's Corporate objectives, to focus the service's action on improvement, and set out effective service monitoring arrangements, performance targets, workforce development and risk management arrangements.
- c) safeguard the planning service's officers, senior managers, and elected members by developing clear arrangements and protocols which set out how they engage directly with planning agents and applicants to ensure integrity, trust and confidence in the service.
- d) establish regular and effective team meeting arrangements to improve communication within the planning service and provide a structured and consistent opportunity for officers to discuss planning and enforcement cases.
- e) put transparent and consistent arrangements in place for the service to act cohesively as a team to discuss officers' differences of opinion on planning applications, to ensure all officers are professionally satisfied with the final planning decisions.
- f) establish service standards and protocols and effectively communicate these to all officers to ensure consistent approaches e.g., how to deal with applications with missing information.
- g) put in place formal staff learning opportunities to ensure a consistent, structured, and proactive approach to support new officers in the role and provide continuous development opportunities for existing staff.
- h) assure that the Planning Service has robust data quality arrangements to ensure that it reports accurate performance data so that staff, Members, Welsh Government, and the public can place reliance on its integrity to make accurate and informed decisions.
- i) identify and learn from good practice from other Local Planning Authorities when implementing service improvements.

No.	Action(s)	Implementation date and/or End date	Lead Officer(s)	Resource implications/support required.
1.	The immediate improvements made to date by the Planning Service will be supported and further enhanced by the Planning Service Improvement Board which will provide corporate oversight and governance, alongside political and strategic direction.	In place.	Executive Director – Economy and Environment	Within existing resources and with support from corporate colleagues in WOD. (Workforce and organizational development)

Priority a): review the political and strategic intent for its planning enforcement responsibilities, clearly communicate this, and align resources to deliver the Council’s chosen intent.

No.	Action(s)	Implementation date and/or End date	Lead Officer(s)	Resource implications/support required.
A1	Statement of intent for the Planning Service to be clearly communicated by the Council.	May 2023	Executive Director – Economy and Environment	Within existing resources.
A2	The Service is to undertake a review of planning enforcement policies and procedures. This review will be to ensure resources are appropriately aligned with enforcement priorities and to investigate the potential to introduce a post determination/pre-implementation service to advised applicants on discharge of	01/09/2023 or earlier.	Principal Planning Officers	Within existing resources.

	condition requirements, with the aim to Reduce planning enforcement workloads by being proactive rather than reactive.			
A3	<p>The Property, Planning and Public Protection Integrated Business Plan has been strengthened and revised to include a stand-alone objective relating to planning enforcement. This will ensure that the Councils intent for planning enforcement is clearly identified, capable of being monitored and appropriately resourced.</p> <p>Objective:</p> <p>“Develop an environment where the Planning Service can sustainably deliver an effective planning enforcement service”.</p>	<p>Implemented 01/04/2023</p> <p>Noting that the IBP is a working document and will be kept under review.</p>	<p>Head of Service – Property, Planning & Public Protection</p>	<p>Within existing resources.</p>
A4.	<p>The Planning Service has appointed two dedicated enforcement officers to address this recommendation.</p>	<p>In place.</p>	<p>Professional Lead - Planning</p>	<p>Within existing resources.</p> <p>Workforce and Organisations Design.</p>
A5.	<p>A broader Planning Service structure review is to be implemented to ensure the most appropriate alignment of resources to enable the Planning Service to sustainably deliver an effective planning service.</p>	<p>31/10/2023</p>	<p>Head of Service – Property, Planning & Public Protection</p>	<p>Within existing resources.</p> <p>Workforce and Organisations Design.</p>
A6.	<p>Additional technical training relating to the serving of planning contravention notices, enforcement notices, breach of condition notices and temporary stop notices is to be Implemented to ensure planners are able professionally undertake enforcement duties.</p>	<p>01/10/2023</p>	<p>Principal Planning Officers</p>	<p>Within existing resources.</p> <p>Workforce and Organisations Design.</p>

A7.	Trial periodic 'enforcement blitz days' (enforcement only), with the principal aim of promoting best practice.	In place	Principal Planning Officers	Within existing resources.
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Priority b): develop a Planning Services Business Plan which underpins the Property, Planning and Public Protection Integrated Business Plan. It should clarify the planning service's links between the planning service and the Council's Corporate objectives, to focus the service's action on improvement, and set out effective service monitoring arrangements, performance targets, workforce development and risk management arrangements.

No.	Action(s)	Implementation date and/or End date	Lead Officer(s)	Resource implications/support required.
B1.	Planning Service to develop its own business plan actioning the objectives identified within the Property, Planning and Public Protection Integrated Business Plan and the Planning Services contribution to a Stronger, Fairer and Greener Powys (golden thread).	01/07/23	Professional Lead - Planning	Within existing resources. Workforce and Organisations Design.

Priority c): safeguard the planning service's officers, senior managers, and elected members by developing clear arrangements and protocols which set out how they engage directly with planning agents and applicants to ensure integrity, trust and confidence in the service.

No.	Action(s)	Implementation date and/or End date	Lead Officer(s)	Resource implications/support required.
C1.	An operational protocol for Agent/Applicant interaction to be adopted by Planning Service. Protocol to be communicated to relevant parties and published on the Councils website.	31/05/2023	Principal Planning Officers	Within existing resources.

Priority d): establish regular and effective team meeting arrangements to improve communication within the planning service and provide a structured and consistent opportunity for officers to discuss planning and enforcement cases.

No.	Action(s)	Implementation date and/or End date	Lead Officer(s)	Resource implications/support required.
D1.	<p>Development Management team meetings are being held weekly to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check on staff wellbeing. • Enable dynamic learning. • Regularly review workload to ensure workload is distributed efficiently. • Provide officers with the opportunity to highlight any workload issues promptly. 	In place.	Principal Planning Officers	<p>Within existing resources.</p> <p>Supported by Workforce and Organisational Design.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a forum for best practice to be shared (appeal decisions for example). 			
D2.	<p>Planning Policy Team meetings are being held every fortnight to.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check on staff wellbeing. • Enable dynamic learning. • Regularly review workload to ensure workload is distributed efficiently. • Provide officers with the opportunity to highlight any workload issues promptly. • Provide a forum for best practice to be shared. 	In place	Principal Planning Officers	<p>Within existing resources.</p> <p>Supported by Workforce and Organisational Design.</p>
D3.	<p>Planning Technician meetings are being held every month to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check on staff wellbeing. • Enable dynamic learning. • Regularly review workload to ensure workload is distributed efficiently. • Provide technicians with the opportunity to highlight any workload issues promptly. • Provide a forum for best practice to be shared. 	In place.	Principal Planning Officers	<p>Within existing resources.</p> <p>Supported by Workforce and Organisational Design.</p>
D4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A full Planning Service Team meeting to be held quarterly. 	In place.	Professional Lead - Planning	<p>Within existing resources.</p> <p>Supported by Workforce and Organisational Design.</p>

D5.	Head of Services/Planning Services meetings to take place every 4 months. These meeting are to provide service updates and to secure feedback on IBP objectives.	In place.	Head of Service – Property, Planning & Public Protection	Within existing resources.
D6.	Director’s briefings to be attended by the Planning team. These meeting take place every quarter and cover broader corporate updates.	In place.	Executive Director – Economy and Environment	Within existing resources.

Priority e): put transparent and consistent arrangements in place for the service to act cohesively as a team to discuss officers’ differences of opinion on planning applications, to ensure all officers are professionally satisfied with the final planning decisions.

No.	Action(s)	Implementation date and/or End date	Lead Officer(s)	Resource implications/support required.
E1.	Weekly Development Management team meetings are in place to enable discussion to take place regarding differences of opinion on planning applications, planning enforcement cases, planning policy and planning case law. This provides a learning and development environment for the team.	In place.	Principal Planning Officers	Within existing resources. Supported by Workforce and Organisational Design.

Priority f): establish service standards and protocols and effectively communicate these to all officers to ensure consistent approaches e.g., how to deal with applications with missing information.

No.	Action(s)	Implementation date and/or End date	Lead Officer(s)	Resource implications/support required.
F1.	<p>Guidance notes have been developed on specific steps required to process planning applications to promote best practice and ensure consistency of approach. All guidance notes have been discussed at Development Management team meetings and at 1-2-1 meetings, where required. Guidance notes are to be used as a training resource for staff induction. The notes are to be kept under review for accuracy and relevance.</p> <p>Guidance notes/protocols completed to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee guidance November 2022. • Site visit guidance – November 2022. • Guidance on recording file note – November 2022. • Community Council call log and liaison guidance – December 2022. • Extension of time procedure, including missing/further information requests – December 2022. • Planning application procedure (for new starters) – January 2023. 	In place.	Principal Planning Officers	<p>Within existing resources.</p> <p>Supported by Workforce and Organisational Design.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RTPI Enforcement Guide – March 2023. • Recording of enforcement cases in Idox – April 2023. 			
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Priority g): put in place formal staff learning opportunities to ensure a consistent, structured, and proactive approach to support new officers in the role and provide continuous development opportunities for existing staff.

No.	Action(s)	Implementation date and/or End date	Lead Officer(s)	Resource implications/support required.
G1.	<p>Complete the implementation of the Planning Working Group training programme to ensure a consistent, structured and proactive approach to support officers, and provide continuous professional development.</p> <p>Training completed to date include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agents' perspective (14/12/2022). • Built Heritage (16/12/2022) • Biodiversity (27/01/2023). • Contaminated Land (09/03/2023). • Environmental Protection (09/03/2023). • Secure by Design (04/04/2023). <p>Upcoming training:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Countryside Services. • Land drainage/SAB/flood risk. 	01/12/2023	Principal Planning Officers	<p>Within existing resources.</p> <p>Supported by Workforce and Organisational Design.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highway safety and infrastructure. • Planning enforcement. • Planning conditions (PEDW/WG). • Validation. 			
G2.	Mentor to be allocated to all new Planners.	In place.	Principal Planning Officers	<p>Within existing resources.</p> <p>Supported by Workforce and Organisational Design.</p>
G3.	<p>Development Management Officers are now required to attend the Council Offices 1-3 days a week (depending on experience), with the principal aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring the team together establishing and strengthening relationships. • Creating a learning environment (learning via osmosis). • Promoting consistency. 	In place.	Principal Planning Officers	<p>Within existing resources.</p> <p>Workforce and Organisational Design.</p>
G4.	<p>Training matrix has been adopted by the Planning Service, with the aim to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure training is recorded (Trent and within Matrix). • Ensure training provision can be appropriate audited. • To assist training gap analysis. • Ensure Checklist for staff induction and mandatory training is being completed within allocated time frames. 	In place.	Professional Lead – Planning & Principal Planning Officers	<p>Within existing resources.</p> <p>Workforce and Organisational Design.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support annual and six-month staff appraisals to identify training needs and ensure continuous professional development. 			
G5.	Weekly Development Management teams meeting are being utilised as a training forum. For example, Police undertook a talk on secure by design at a weekly meeting.	In place.	Principal Planning Officers	Within existing resources. Workforce and Organisational Design.
G6.	Workforce and Organisational Design team facilitated team away day to support team development.	01/08/2023	Principal Planning Officers	Within existing resources. Workforce and Organisational Design.

Priority h): assure that the Planning Service has robust data quality arrangements to ensure that it reports accurate performance data so that staff, Members, Welsh Government, and the public can place reliance on its integrity to make accurate and informed decisions.

No.	Action(s)	Implementation date and/or End date	Lead Officer(s)	Resource implications/support required.
H1.	Protocol for inputting planning enforcement data into Planning ICT system (Idox) has been developed and communicated to the Development Management team via a Development Management team meeting.	In place.	Principal Planning Officers	Within existing resources. Workforce and Organisational Design.

Priority i): identify and learn from good practice from other Local Planning Authorities when implementing service improvements.

No.	Action(s)	Implementation date and/or End date	Lead Officer(s)	Resource implications/support required.
i1.	<p>Planning Service is attending regional and national planning groups, with the aim to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote consistency. • Identify and promote best practice. • Promote benchmarking. • Promote networking. • Aid officer development. <p>Groups to be attended include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Wales Development Management Group • All Wales Development Management Group - This group discusses common issues and has historically discussed issues such as problems experienced when management do not follow Case Officer recommendation. This group is also periodically joined by the Planning Inspectorate (PEDW) • Planning Officers Society for Wales group. This group is attended by WGLA, RTPI and quarterly by WG. PAS also attend periodically. • All Wales Biodiversity Forum 	In place.	Professional Lead – Planning.	<p>Within existing resources.</p> <p>Workforce and Organisational Design.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All Wales Design Forum• All Wales Built Heritage Forum• River SAC Planning Subgroup• Mid Wales Policy Group <p>Feedback from regional and national groups is to be communicated to the Planning Service at relevant team meetings or at designated training events where required.</p>			
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